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ABSTRACT

The 1998 Roper Youth Report is based on a nationwide cross-section of 1,189 children aged 6 to 17 years. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in the children's homes during April and May, 1998. Children who watch Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) are more likely to read, be active participants and share in family activities than non-viewers. PBS viewers and non-viewers watch the same amount of television. PBS is most popular among younger children (ages 6 and 7). Comparing the data from 1997 and 1998, Roper Youth Reports show that overall, this year slightly fewer kids and teenagers report reading a magazine (30% vs 34%), or non-school book (27% vs. 33%) in the survey week, while slightly higher proportions report using the Internet/World Wide Web (18% vs. 12%). PBS viewers are more likely to read non-school books than non-PBS viewers. Viewers tend to be more active in sports, to participate more in school activities and are also more likely to belong to groups outside of school. PBS viewers are more likely to spend time with their family than non-PBS viewers. Viewers' parents seem to have a strong influence on their childrens' personal choices and are important decision makers. Children who watch PBS also report more frequently that their families have stricter family rules. Online usage among children 8-17 is on the rise; children who watch PBS are more likely to use computers than non-viewers. They are also more likely to say they look forward to going to school. (AEF)

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Children Who View PBS
1998 Roper Youth Report - Update

Children who watch PBS are more likely to read, be active participants and share in family activities than non-viewers, according to the 1998 Roper Youth Report. This report confirms the findings from the 1996 Youth Report about children aged 6-17 who watch PBS, as reported in CPB Research Note #99, January 1997.

Television Plays a Significant Role in Children's Daily Lives

PBS viewers and non-viewers watch the same amount of television. However, they are all watching more television than in 1996. Increasing use of the Internet does not appear to be affecting children's television usage. The average child spends about 31 hours a week watching television, 2 hours more than in 1996. The Roper Youth Report suggests that "this increase probably reflects major efforts by network and cable television to reach the youth market with a wide variety of new programming options".[1]

PBS is Most Popular Among Younger Children

This year, 34% of the sample indicated having viewed PBS in the week prior to being interviewed. This percentage is highest among children ages 6 and 7: almost six in ten (57%) had watched PBS in the past week. Viewership of PBS declines among 8 to 12 year-olds (37%) and among 13 to 17 year-olds (21%) although a sizeble portion continue to watch public television throughout their youth.

Changing Reading Habits?

Comparing the data from 1997 and 1998, Roper Youth Reports show that "Overall, this year slightly fewer kids and teenagers report reading a magazine (30% vs. 34%), or non-school book (27% vs. 33%) in the past week, while slightly higher proportions report using Internet/Worldwide Web (18% vs. 12%). This suggests that

1. 1998 Roper Youth Report, Analysis, page 80.

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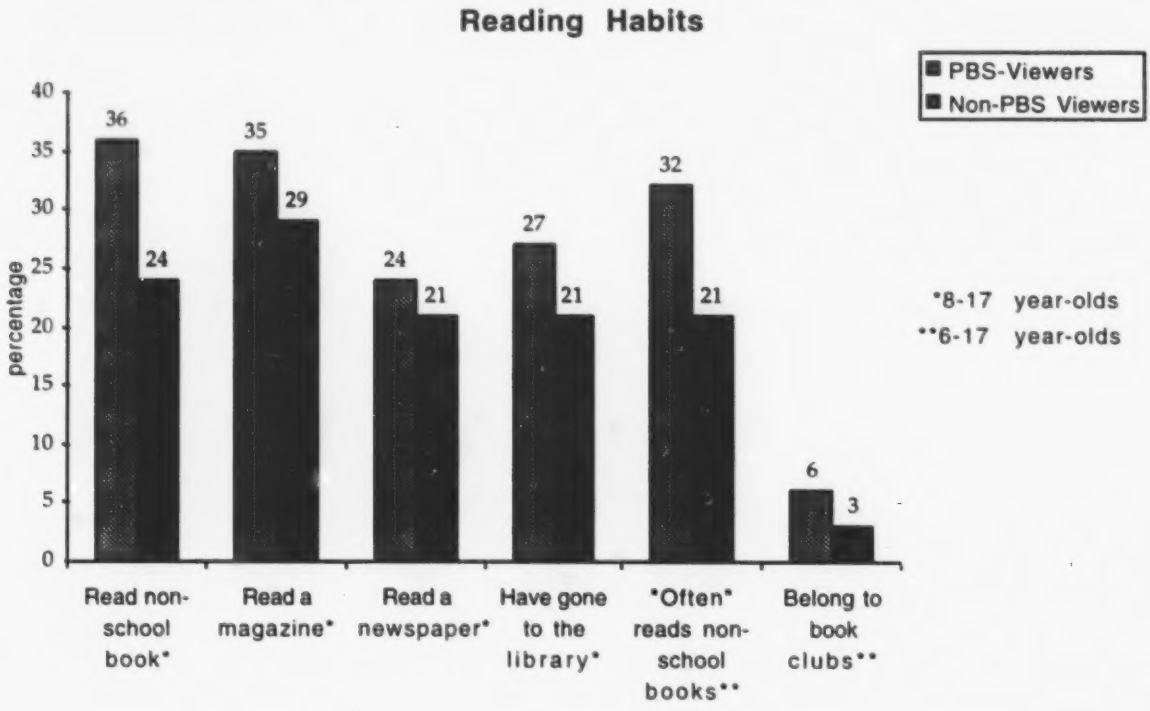
the Internet may be beginning to make inroads into children's reading habits."[2]

Although, overall, there was a slight decrease in all children's reading habits over the past two years, it is worth noting that reading is still higher among PBS viewers than among non-viewers.

PBS viewers are more likely to read non-school books than non-PBS viewers. PBS children's programs encourage reading and the PBS viewers exhibit more reading in their behavior.

When asked about the things they have personally done in the past week, PBS viewers were more likely to have read a non-school book (36% vs. 24%), to have read a newspaper (24% vs. 21%), to have gone to the library (27% vs. 21%) or to have read a magazine (35% vs. 29%) than the non-viewers. When asked how frequently they read books other than school books or comics, PBS viewers are also more likely do it "often" (32% vs. 21%). They are also more likely to belong to a book club or reading group outside school (6% vs. 3%).



2. 1998 Roper Youth Report, Analysis, page 56.

PBS Viewers Are Active Participants

The educational and activity-oriented emphasis that is found in PBS programs is reflected in its viewers' actions.

The 1998 Roper Youth Report confirms once more that PBS viewers are somehow different from children who did not recall watching PBS. PBS viewers tend to be more active in sports, to participate more in school activities and are also more likely to belong to groups outside of school. When talking about personal interests, children (8-17 years old) who watch PBS tend to be more interested in science (58% vs. 51%), crafts (51% vs. 39%), cooking (44% vs. 37%) and computers (59% vs. 51%) than their counterparts. They are also more likely to have played a musical instrument (21% vs 13%), to have exercised/worked out (42% vs. 37%) or to have done an arts and crafts project (31% vs. 17%) in the past week.

When discussing their attitudes towards social issues, the PBS viewers (8-17 year-olds) are more likely to be "very concerned" about issues such as pollution, the use of illegal drugs, homelessness and crime in their neighborhood than the non-PBS viewers.

Watching TV Together

According to the Roper Youth Reports, the percentage of children aged 8-17 watching TV together with their families has increased from 71% in 1997 to 74% in 1998. This increase may suggest that parents, feeling somewhat more secure in this robust economy, are making more time to spend with children and are incrementally shifting the work and family balance back in direction of family. This percentage is even higher among 6-7 year-olds (97%)[3] and 8-12 year-olds (80%) than 13-17 year-olds (67%). This is expected because as children get older, their TV viewing habits usually become more autonomous and less family-focused.

PBS viewers are more likely to have dinner together, to watch TV with their family, to watch movies on the VCR together as well as to sit and talk together than non-PBS viewers.

Since PBS viewers tend to skew younger, one might expect the stronger family focus. However, as the chart below indicates, even among 8-17 year-olds there is a significantly higher percentage of PBS kids reporting family-focused activities.

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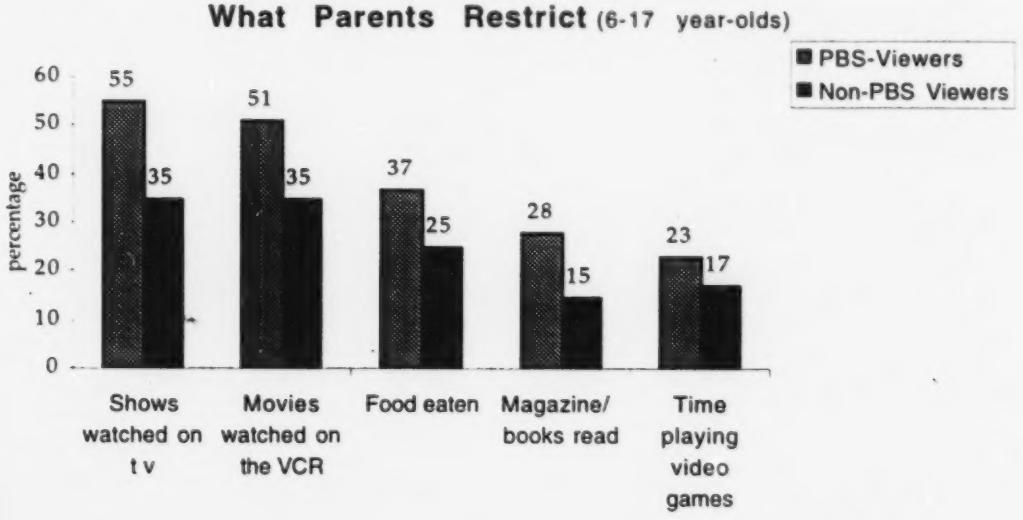
3. 1998 Roper Youth Report, page 91. This percentage includes the kids who have answered "often" (59%) and "sometimes" (38%).

Doing Things Together with the Family	Children 6-7 year-olds "often" do			Children 8-17 year-olds "frequently" do		
	PBS %	Non-PBS %	Point Diff.	PBS %	Non-PBS %	Point Diff.
Have dinner together	89	80	+9	67	53	+14
Watch TV together	64	48	+16	43	30	+13
Sit & talk together	63	53	+10	35	24	+11
Watch VCR together	56	35	+21	31	23	+8

Families Play a More Active Role

PBS viewers' parents seem to have a strong influence on their children's personal choices and are important decision-makers. The children (8-17 years old) were asked what influences them the most in their choices (for example, the movies and TV programs they watch, what they will be when they grow up, what they buy with their spending money, whether to drink or not). PBS viewers are more likely to be influenced by their parents than the non-PBS viewers. Non-PBS viewers are more likely to be influenced by their best friends and brothers and sisters.

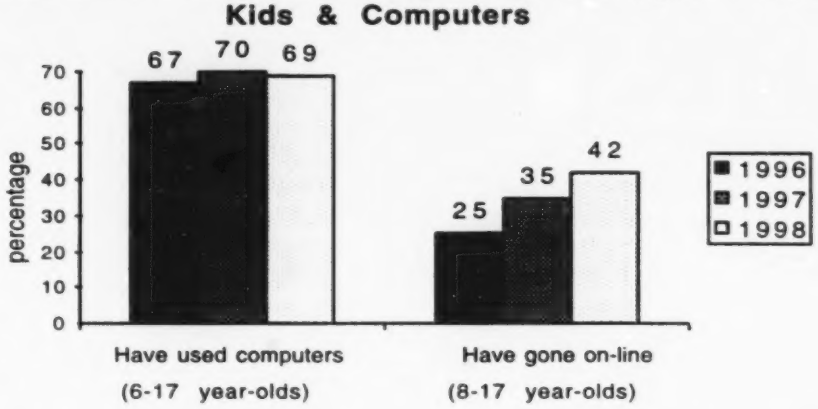
Kids who watch PBS also report more frequently that their families have strict rules about the kinds of shows they can watch on TV, the movies they can watch, the food they eat, the magazines/books they read and the time they spend playing video games.



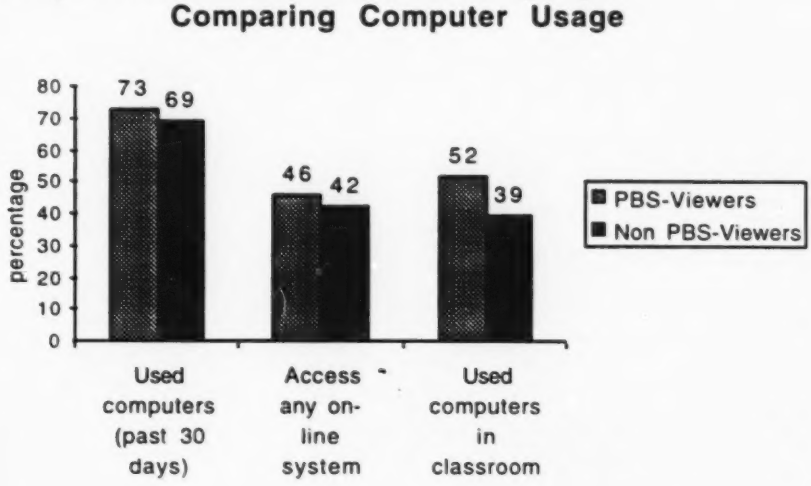
More Kids are On-line

This year, as in the past two years, seven out of every ten 6 to 17 year-olds used a computer at home, at school or elsewhere in the past 30 days.(1998: 69% vs. 1997: 70% and 1996: 67%).

But on-line usage among children 8 to 17 is clearly on the rise. For the third year in a row, on-line use has increased steadily from 25% in 1996, to 35% in 97, to 42% in 98. This means that more than four in ten children (ages 8 to 17) are now on the web!



Comparing computer usage among PBS viewers and non-PBS viewers, children who watch PBS are still more likely to have used computers in the past 30 days (although they are slightly more likely to have used them at school than at home, opposite to the non-viewers), are more likely to access any on-line system (46% vs. 42%) and are also more likely to have used computers in their classroom in the past week (52% vs. 39%). However, there is not a significant difference in computer *ownership* between the two groups.



PBS Viewers Like School

PBS viewers (ages 8-17 years-old) are more likely to say they look forward to going to school (76% vs. 68%) than non-viewers. While they are at school, besides using more computer in the classroom, PBS viewers are also more likely to have read a book (48% vs 33%) and to have watched educational videos/films (35% vs 22%) in the week prior to being interviewed than the non-PBS viewers. PBS viewers report learning from these sources more frequently than non-viewers.

The teenagers (ages 13-17 years-old) who watch PBS are more likely to report that there are fewer students in their schools carrying weapons, little gang activity and less violence than non-PBS viewers report.

Demographics

As seen in the 1996 Roper Youth Report, children who watch PBS continue to share the same demographics as children in the rest of the population. The distribution of demographic characteristics such as household income, parents' education, ethnicity, family composition and attending public school are the same among children who watch PBS and those who do not.

Methodology

The 1998 Roper Youth Report is based on a nationwide cross-section of 1,189 children aged 6 to 17 years-old. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in the children's homes, during April and May, 1998.

CPB asked Roper to prepare tabulations based on children's viewership of PBS.

Fernanda Ferreira, a Fulbright Fellow at the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, prepared this report with the assistance of Lauren Komarow, CPB research assistant.

If you have questions about these data, please contact Janice Jones at (202) 879-9677 or e-mail jjones@cpb.org. We welcome your comments and suggestions about how to make the information more useful to you.